

3/13/2020

Brothers and sisters,

This week has been a strange week, to say the least. Today for the first time that I have ever heard of the Bishop of the Western North Carolina United Methodist Church, Paul Leeland, sent a request to all Methodist Churches in Western North Carolina to suspend worship for the next two weeks because of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus. As your pastor I feel it is best to observe the Bishop's wishes. While I know this is disappointing, we will be operating in an overabundance of caution. The next time we gather together as the full Body of Christ will be on March 29th, for a combined 10:30 worship service, with a covered dish to follow! This will also mean the cancellation of youth programs as well as our United Methodist Kids Programs for the next two weeks. We will continue to have cantata practice on Sunday afternoons, as well as Bible Study on Wednesday evenings at 6pm.

This is a bit of uncharted territory. As far back as I can remember, I cannot recall a day that church was canceled when there was not snow on the ground. Yet here we are, and I know during this time anxiety is running high. You may find yourself wondering what it is that you can do.

First and foremost pray! There is no substitution for praying, pray for our church, our community, our state, our nation, and our world. Secondly, we will still be having Bible Study of Wednesday nights at 6pm. If you haven't had the opportunity to participate in Bible Study in the past this would be a great time to start. We are studying through 1 John and would love to have you join.

Secondly we will be live streaming worship on our Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/First-United-Methodist-Church-Cherryville-112642183423394/?modal=admin_todo_tour). Service will begin at 10:30 am on Sunday, and if you can't tune in at that time the worship will be posted throughout the week.

I thank you for the many and varied ways that you serve God and serve your neighbors. It is an honor to be your pastor, and with that comes a responsibility that I do not take lightly. I know how important cooperative worship is as a catalyst for our connection to God, and since we will be deprived of that opportunity over the next two weeks I hope you will be intentional about nurturing your connection with God through daily devotionals and Scripture readings, as well as taking time to be intentional about your prayer life.

I have copied the letter from our Bishop to this letter for you to read. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. Know you are in my prayers, and I give thanks to God for the gift of our time together.

Grace and Peace,
Zack Christy

Bishop's Letter:

March 12, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

As we continue to receive communications and information regarding the COVID-19 virus, we are aware of the significant challenges arising on a daily basis. The virus is spreading rapidly, and there are an increasing number of cases reported throughout the state. We know the virus is highly contagious and that mitigation is possible with cautious measures.

It is extremely important that we slow the rate of infection in order to allow our health care services to respond appropriately. If the infection rate increases too quickly, we may not have the health care support required for everyone needing treatment.

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of the North Carolina Conference and I agree that it is important to suspend public worship for the next two weeks, beginning today. Please use your discretion regarding smaller gatherings like small groups, Bible studies, etc. These precautions are not only important for your own safety but for the health and welfare of the entire community. While we are in unfamiliar territory, health care professionals advise that this is necessary for slowing the rate of infection.

With the awareness of so many who depend on our church ministries, we hope you will be mindful of the need to continue to support these ministries and those of your local church. Your prayers, presence (in spirit), gifts (including financial support), service, and witness are still important and needed to sustain and strengthen our ongoing mission.

Please take precautions to keep yourself, loved ones, congregations, and communities safe.

With gratitude for you and your leadership,

Bishop Paul L. Leeland

Western North Carolina Conference

United Methodist Church